



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF
ENERGY

**Richland Operations
Office**

DOE News Release

Media Contact:

Geoff Tyree, DOE
(509) 376-4171, Geoff_Tyree@rl.gov

**For Immediate Release:
September 28, 2009**

Cleanup of Soil under Hanford Nuclear Reactor Basin Begins

RICHLAND, Wash. – Workers at the U.S. Department of Energy’s Hanford Site have begun cleaning up contaminated soil under a nuclear reactor basin that was once considered a top environmental risk at the government site in Washington State that produced plutonium for national defense programs from the 1940s to the 1980s.

Contractor CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company started excavating contaminated soil yesterday, just two weeks after the company’s employees finished another cleanup milestone, removing the K East Basin that once stored tons of highly radioactive material underwater. Both activities met important milestones in the regulatory agreement governing Hanford cleanup, the Tri-Party Agreement.

“Several years of very challenging work inside the basin and removing the basin itself have brought us to this very important step in cleanup,” said Dave Brockman, Manager of the Department of Energy’s Richland Operations Office. “We’re addressing one of the greatest hazards to the Columbia River from the legacy of producing plutonium at Hanford.”

The basin was located adjacent to the K East Reactor, one of nine plutonium production reactors along the Columbia River on the Hanford Site. The 1.2-million-gallon basin once held 1,100 tons of uranium metal fuel rods, known as spent nuclear fuel, leftover from Hanford reactors after plutonium processing ended, as well as sludge, a byproduct of fuel corrosion during years of storage. The highly radioactive spent fuel and less radioactive sludge were stored in 20 feet of water that provided shielding. Soil underneath the basin had been contaminated by leaks of water from the concrete basin in the 1970s and 1990s.

Workers finished removing the spent nuclear fuel from the basin 2004 and the sludge in 2007. Water was drained from the basin in 2008 and workers demolished the basin’s superstructure that same year. Between October 2008 and September 2009, workers filled more than 2,000 large containers with debris as they excavated the basin that was 20 feet deep, 125 feet long and 67 feet wide. The waste was disposed of in the lined, engineered disposal facility on the Hanford Site for low-level waste, the Environmental Restoration Disposal Facility.

“We have had close coordination between our D&D and Soil and Groundwater organizations,” said John Lehew, President of CH2M HILL Plateau Remediation Company. “Our team has worked extremely hard to initiate soil remediation as quickly as possible upon completing the basin demolition. With the dedicated workforce, I am confident we will complete the soils work safely and expeditiously.”

Commitments under the Tri-Party Agreement among the DOE, Washington State Department of Ecology and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency called for DOE to begin excavation of contaminated soil under the K East Basin within one month of removing the basin (completed on September 9).

###